

### Who Was Shut Out?: Immigration Quotas, 1925–1927

In response to growing public opinion against the flow of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe in the years following World War I, Congress passed first the Quota Act of 1921 then the even more restrictive Immigration Act of 1924 (the Johnson-Reed Act). Initially, the 1924 law imposed a total quota on immigration of 165,000—less than 20 percent of the pre-World War I average. It based ceilings on the number of immigrants from any particular nation on the percentage of each nationality recorded in the 1890 census—a blatant effort to limit immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, which mostly occurred after that date. In the first decade of the 20th century, an average of 200,000 Italians had entered the United States each year. With the 1924 Act, the annual quota for Italians was set at less than 4,000. This table shows the annual immigration quotas under the 1924 Immigration Act.

<i>Northwest Europe and Scandinavia</i>		<i>Eastern and Southern Europe</i>		<i>Other Countries</i>	
Country	Quota	Country	Quota	Country	Quota
Germany	51,227	Poland	5,982	Africa (other than Egypt)	1,100
Great Britain and Northern Ireland	34,007	Italy	3,845	Armenia	124
Irish Free State (Ireland)	28,567	Czechoslovakia	3,073	Australia	121
Sweden	9,561	Russia	2,248	Palestine	100
Norway	6,453	Yugoslavia	671	Syria	100
France	3,954	Romania	603	Turkey	100
Denmark	2,789	Portugal	503	Egypt	100
Switzerland	2,081	Hungary	473	New Zealand & Pacific Islands	100
Netherlands	1,648	Lithuania	344	All others	1,900
Austria	785	Latvia	142		
Belgium	512	Spain	131		
Finland	471	Estonia	124		
Free City of Danzig	228	Albania	100		
Iceland	100	Bulgaria	100		
Luxembourg	100	Greece	100		
<b>Total (Number)</b>	<b>142,483</b>	<b>Total (Number)</b>	<b>18,439</b>	<b>Total (Number)</b>	<b>3,745</b>
<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>86.5</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>2.3</b>

**(Total Annual immigrant quota: 164,667)**

Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1929), 100.



## 5. MASSACHUSETTS SENATOR DAVID I. WALSH OPPOSES THE NEW IMMIGRATION QUOTAS OF 1924

*Not all Americans supported the effort to restrict and regulate the origins of immigrants. The following plea for an end to what he saw as prejudice was made by Massachusetts Senator David Ignatius Walsh in the Senate, on April 15, 1924.*

What is the real driving force behind the movement of basing the quota on the census of 1890? The peoples of the world will attribute it to our belief that the "Nordic" is a superior race. The world will assume that our Government considers the Italians, Greeks, Jews, Poles, and the Slavs inferior to the Nordics, congenitally as well as culturally. It is a dangerous

assumption. Millions of people here in America will resent this slur upon their racial character. . . .

The history of this country records that from the beginning the dominant groups in control of its affairs have regarded each group of newer strangers as more or less the "enemy" to be feared and, if possible, controlled. Even as early as the year 1700 . . . when the Dutch came and settled in great numbers in what is now New York City[,] the English and Scotch colonists thought them an inferior and an unwholesome contribution to the population of the colonies. But within a few years these people intermarried and the storm against the previously unwelcome Dutch subsided . . . .

Thus, all down the years, history records this haughty spirit asserting itself again and again whenever a new race of people dared to seek peace and protection in America, but happily this attempted caste control based on the accident of birth, wealth, or privilege has never made any great progress, for such unholy and inhuman prejudices can never prevail in this democracy. . . .

What are the nationalities whose coming to America is chiefly curtailed by this arbitrary resort to the 1890 census? The Greeks, to whom civilization owes so much in the fields of literature,



*David Walsh, U.S. Senator from Massachusetts, argued against the use of immigration quotas.*

science, art, and government. The Italians, who from the day of early Roman history have contributed immensely to civilization along the lines of government, literature, art, music, and navigation, including the gift of the discoverer of America. The liberty-loving Poles, whose sacrifices and struggles for freedom have arrested the admiration of mankind. . . . The Jews, who contributed to the world literature, religion, standards of righteous conduct that can not be overvalued. . . .

Have we learned nothing from the earlier generations' mistaken notions about the Dutch, the French, the Irish, the Germans, and the Scandinavians . . . ? They were condemned and criticized by the earlier settlers, just as we are now undertaking to condemn the races from southern Europe. . . .

Read the names . . . in the American military cemeteries in France. Go there, you who are saying that certain races are undesirable, and read the names upon the graves of the poor lads. . . . Read the names of these dead; read the names of those over whom the poppies now grow, practically all of them foreign born—Poles, Italians, Greeks, and Slavs. . . .

Stop, I urge you, before you announce not only to Americans who are descendants of all the races . . . but to the peoples of the world that certain races are ineligible to enjoy American citizenship.

"Keep America American." Yes; but do not keep out of America through discriminatory immigration laws any lover of liberty, whatever his accident of birth may be, if he is willing to live in America, accept its ideals, and die, if necessary, for the preservation of American institutions.



